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C O N F I D E N T I A L BERLIN 001549

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TAGS: PREL MARR PGOV AF GM
SUBJECT: GERMANY FORMALLY SCALES DOWN PARTICIPATION IN OEF
TO JUST MARITIME OPERATIONS

REF: A. BERLIN 1413
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Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JEFF RATHKE. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. A new parliamentary mandate significantly reduces the geographic area in which German armed forces are allowed to operate under OEF and reduces the troop ceiling by almost half. As a result, German military forces will no longer have the ability to participate in combat operations under OEF in Afghanistan. While the changes in the mandate may be symbolically important, they will have little or no practical effect on the ground in Afghanistan or elsewhere, given Germany's already limited participation in OEF over the past several years. Chancellor Merkel's CDU had long championed the controversial provision for deploying up to 100 German Special Forces (KSK) to Afghanistan under OEF, but relented on this in the face of growing pressure from its SPD coalition partners. Despite the removal of the controversial KSK element, a notable number of SPD parliamentarians defied their party leadership and voted against the mandate, reflecting the OEF's maligned reputation in Germany and a growing desire to "regularize" OEF and mandate it through a UNSCR. END SUMMARY.

SCALING DOWN THE MANDATE

12. (C) The Bundestag renewed on November 13 the parliamentary mandate that authorizes the Bundeswehr to participate in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and NATO's Operation Active Endeavor (OAE), but as proposed by the Grand Coalition government, significantly reduced the geographic area in which German forces are allowed to operate under OEF. South and Central Asia (including Afghanistan), the Arabian peninsula and Northeast Africa were removed from the mandate, leaving just the Horn of Africa and surrounding waters. In addition, the overall troop ceiling was reduced from 1,400 to 800 and the controversial authorization to deploy up to 100 German Special Forces (KSK) was eliminated. This means that Germany's participation in OEF is now restricted solely to maritime operations. German military forces no longer have the ability to participate in combat operations under OEF in Afghanistan. The mandate was extended for 13 months (rather than the normal 12) so that it will not come up for debate and renewal until after the September 2009 parliamentary elections and the new Bundestag is seated.

LIMITED PRACTICAL EFFECTS

13. (C) While these changes in the mandate may be symbolically important, they should have little or no practical effect on

current German contributions to OEF operations in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Only 90 German military personnel are currently deployed under the OEF mandate: 24 in OAE in the Mediterranean and the rest in OEF maritime operations around the Horn of Africa. Even when Germany takes over TF-150 in January and re-deploys a frigate (currently it has only P-3 Orion aircraft under OEF), its total contingent will be far under the new troop ceiling of 800. In recent years, the Bundeswehr has not had more than 200-300 military personnel under OEF at any given time. The Germans have reportedly not deployed their Special Forces under OEF since 2002-03, which was one of the arguments used by OEF skeptics to push for eliminating this part of the parliamentary mandate. They claimed it made no sense to continue a "virtual mandate" that was not used.

THE POLITICS BEHIND THE CHANGES

¶4. (C) In spite of the fact that the KSK has not been deployed to Afghanistan under OEF for quite some time, Chancellor Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) had long insisted on retaining this element in the mandate to demonstrate Germany's continued commitment to the war on terrorism. However, in the face of growing pressure from its Social Democratic Party (SPD) coalition partners (particularly FM Steinmeier), who argued that retaining the controversial KSK element was undermining SPD rank-and-file support for the Bundeswehr's deployment in Afghanistan under ISAF, the CDU relented and agreed to its elimination in early September.

¶5. (C) Chancellery sources claim that in return, Steinmeier

has given assurances that he will rally his party in support of a future parliamentary mandate to allow the Bundeswehr to participate in the planned NATO AWACS mission to Afghanistan.

Of course, this quid pro quo was not mentioned in the government documents sent the Bundestag. The official government justification for reducing the OEF troop ceiling and eliminating the KSK element was that this was in line with the general "shift in center of gravity in Afghanistan from OEF to ISAF."

ANALYSIS OF THE VOTE

¶6. (C) The scaled-down OEF mandate was approved with a large majority in the Bundestag, 428-130, with 8 abstentions and 40 no-shows. The bulk of the "no" votes came from the Greens and the Left Party who, as in past years, voted in block against the mandate. On the other hand, both the CDU and the opposition Free Democratic Party (FDP) voted overwhelmingly in favor of the mandate, with only a handful of "no" votes.

¶7. (C) Despite the removal of the controversial KSK element, a notable number of SPD parliamentarians (25 out of the 222-member caucus) defied their party leadership and voted against the mandate. While the number of SPD defections is down from last spring's vote on deploying Tornado aircraft (69) and last fall's OEF mandate (42), it is still significantly above what had been the norm as recently as 2005, when only SPD parliamentarian opposed mandate renewal.

¶8. (C) This upward trend in SPD opposition to the mandate reflects first and foremost the fact that the OEF brand name in Germany has been badly (and unfairly) maligned in recent years. It has become common to attribute almost every problem in Afghanistan, especially civilian casualties, to OEF, even though the bulk of combat operations in Afghanistan have been conducted under ISAF since 2006. The increasing opposition to the mandate also reflects the wide-spread view among left-of-center political forces that seven years after 9/11, it is time to "regularize" OEF and have it mandated through a UN Security Council Resolution, rather than for it to continue to be legally based on the self-defense provisions of Article 51 of the UN Charter.

TIMKEN JR